

A LITERARY TRESPASSER: D. H. LAWRENCE'S USE OF WOMEN'S WRITING

HILARY CROXFORD SIMPSON

Department of English, University of Reading

'I think the only re-sourcing of art, revivifying it, is to make it more the joint work of man and woman' (D. H. Lawrence, letter of June 2, 1914).

'Plagiarism begins at home' (Zelda Fitzgerald, 1922).

An aspect of D. H. Lawrence's work which has generally passed unremarked by critics is the extent to which he used women as actual or potential collaborators, and women's writing as source material. For example, *The Boy in the Bush*, which was published under the joint authorship of Lawrence and Mollie Skinner, has been largely ignored in critical studies.¹ Again, it is now well-known that *The Trespasser* was based upon an autobiographical prose-poem of Helen Corke's, but when this fact is mentioned in passing it is usually to imply that any faults in the novel result from Lawrence's use of an 'inferior' writer's work as his starting-point. Little attempt has been made to examine the implications of this curious and significant part of Lawrence's technique, yet, from the involvement of Jessie Chambers and Louie Burrows in his earliest literary ventures, through to the novels that were planned in conjunction with Mollie Skinner, Mabel Dodge Luhan and Catherine Carswell in the 1920s, collaboration with women and reliance on their own writing remained a constant feature of his method.

When commentators *have* remarked upon this fact, they have been careful to play down its possible significance. Thus, Harry T. Moore, in writing of the 'Miriam papers' (notes by Jessie Chambers which formed the basis for scenes in *Sons and Lovers*), warns against assuming that Jessie was in any real sense a collaborator in the novel, and merely adds:

'Although Lawrence had from the feminine elements in his nature a remarkable intuitive understanding of women, he would sometimes ask the women he knew to write down what they had felt or possibly would feel in certain situations: in this way various women provided him with some of his "sources"' (Moore, 1974, p. 51).

But Lawrence not only solicited notes and reminiscences from Jessie, from his wife Frieda, from Mabel Dodge Luhan and others—in itself a fairly unusual procedure—he also took over women's manuscripts and rewrote them, as in the cases of Helen Corke and Mollie Skinner, and once or twice made attempts at a genuine collaboration. It is of course a truism that most novelists draw to some extent on the circumstances and experiences of those close to them, as well as on their own experiences, for the substance of their art. In adopting the exterior details of Louie Burrows's home and family background for the

¹ A summary of the critical material available on this, the only work of Lawrence's actually to be published as a collaboration, can be found in Harry T. Moore's introduction to the Phoenix edition (1972).

character of Ursula in *The Rainbow*, for instance, Lawrence was not doing anything very unusual. A novelist may also make use of others to check details or provide facts; so that we find, for example, Lawrence asking Jessie 'to take a tram ride out to Basford and bring him word what the registry office looked like' (Chambers, 1965, p. 116) when he was writing an early version of *The White Peacock*. But this sort of incidental reliance on information furnished willingly or unwittingly by his women acquaintances is of a different order from his more extensive rewriting of women's experience. Nor is it a question of simple plagiarism or the influence of one literary work upon another—what are involved are those private processes of collaboration and revision which rarely receive attention.

Lawrence seems to have thought it crucial that female experience should find expression in the novel, and he never gives the impression of consciously wishing to repress women's writing. On the contrary, the evidence shows that he gave forceful encouragement to the women he knew in their own literary work: one has only to look at the letters to Catherine Carswell. He was frequently annoyed when they wouldn't, or couldn't, write as effortlessly and copiously as he himself did. He never expected the women he knew to act as the typical writer's amanuensis (although some of them volunteered for the part), and he appears to have been ready to take women's criticism of his own work seriously.

Yet Lawrence's encouragement and his expectation of high standards could shade off into anger and impatience when these standards were not met—or, one suspects, when the writer in question had standards of her own. At such times Lawrence's reaction was usually that *he* could do better. He was only intermittently aware of the special problems faced by women writers. He was never interested in detailed, patient revision, either of his own work or of other people's. His method of revising his own novels was usually to start writing them out again from the beginning, and he often gave others' writing the same treatment. In this respect the genesis of the poem 'Coldness in Love' (*Complete Poems*, p. 98) is interesting. Helen Corke showed Lawrence a poem she had written called 'Fantasy', about a trip they had made together to the coast.² Lawrence promptly produced his own poem, based on the same situation, taking Helen's theme and recasting it to his own satisfaction. The final printed version could be in the voice of either a man or a woman, but in fact the emotions are Helen's, as her autobiography reveals, although anyone reading the poem without a knowledge of its background would assume them to be Lawrence's. Lawrence commented to her, 'I always feel, when you give me an idea, how much better I could work it out myself!' (Moore, 1974, p. 102)—an appropriate epigraph to any discussion of Lawrence's attitude towards women's articulation of their own experience in literary form.

It does not appear that Lawrence's collaborating instincts extended to his male friends to the same degree. He worked with his friend S. S. Kotliansky on translations from Russian; Lawrence would completely rewrite Kotliansky's basic English version, polishing up the style as he went along. But he never involved other men in the process of composition in the way that he did women. The traditional justification is that Lawrence, being a man, could draw the feelings and reactions of his male characters from his own experience, while with female characters he needed to be sure that he had 'got it right'. But apart from the possible objection that this explanation presupposes areas of sexually-defined experience to which anyone of the appropriate gender has access, there is also a historical dimension to the question which must be borne in mind.

² Helen's poem is not extant but the incident that inspired it is recorded in her autobiography *In Our Infancy* (1975), pp. 195–196.

It is now generally acknowledged that the history of the novel as a literary form is in many ways closely bound up with the history of women. To an extent which has no real parallel in other genres, women have been conspicuous as the authors, the readers and the subject matter of novels. Women writers have used the novel more than any other literary form, and recent feminist criticism has quite rightly drawn attention to their achievements. But we must also take into account the fact that male novelists have to an unusual degree organized their works specifically around women's experience.

A significant number of early English novels are books by men which purport in some way to be first-hand accounts of women's lives. In Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), for example, Moll appears to be telling her own story in the first person, and Defoe claims to have merely edited it 'from her own memorandums'. In the Preface he talks of the difficulties he has had in making Moll's account fit for publication:

'It is true, that the original of this Story is put into new Words, and the Stile of the famous Lady we here speak of is a little alter'd, particularly she is made to tell her own Tale in modester Words than she told it at first; the Copy which came first to Hand, having been written in Language, more like one still in *Newgate*, than one grown Penitent and Humble, as she afterwards pretends to be.

The Pen employ'd in finishing her Story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak Language fit to be read: When a Woman debauch'd from her Youth, nay, even being the Off-spring of Debauchery and Vice, comes to give an Account of all her vicious Practises, and even to descend to the particular Occasions and Circumstances, by which she first became wicked, and of all the progression of Crime which she run through in threescore Year, an Author must be hard put to it to wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vitious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage' (ed. Starr, 1976, p. 1).

We may see here the seeds of the concept of a male *editing* of women's experience which has been a crucial factor in the development of the novel: Defoe claims not only to be polishing, but also to be censoring, a woman's account of her own life.

In Samuel Richardson's tremendously influential novels, *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa Harlowe* (1747-1748), another variety of first-person narrative, the letter, is used to give the reader the impression that she or he has a privileged and unmediated access to the most intimate thoughts and experiences of the heroine. Richardson was widely praised for his delineation of female experience, and while this was partly a matter of sensibility, it was also based on some solid research. He had a large circle of women friends with whom he kept up a steady correspondence about his writing, soliciting and incorporating their suggestions, and in turn encouraging them in their own literary work. This is a pattern which crops up with significant frequency in the lives of male novelists. These members of Richardson's circle played a particularly important part in the composition of Richardson's third novel, also in epistolary form, *Sir Charles Grandison*—they contributed whole scenes and one of them completely revised the manuscript. Richardson went so far as to plan a sequel to *Sir Charles Grandison* which was to be wholly a collaborative effort, consisting entirely of letters contributed by his women friends, but this project failed to materialize.³

³ This aspect of Richardson's work is discussed by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1977), chapter 6.

As narrative technique became more sophisticated it no longer became necessary for the novelist to insist on the psychological veracity of his fiction by casting it in autobiographical or epistolary form, but the part played by female experience as subject matter continued to be important as the novel developed. The orientation of the male novelist of Lawrence's period is more complex than might appear at first sight because, as Carolyn Heilbrun has noted, 'for a period of nearly fifty years such major writers as Ibsen, James, Shaw, Lawrence, Forster were to find that, at the height of their powers, it was a woman hero who best met the requirements of their imaginations' (Heilbrun, 1973, p. 49). Heilbrun defines the 'woman hero' as specifically the creation of male writers who found in the predicament of modern woman, in 'the peculiar tension that exists between her apparent freedom and her actual relegation to a constrained destiny' (Heilbrun, 1973, p. 93), a sort of ready-made metaphor for man's own existential dilemma; the problems that the modern novelist is dealing with appear in a heightened form, or at least a form more appropriate for examination in art, in women's experience. In addition, the trend of the modern novel has been towards a rendering of inner psychological states rather than of action, of exploring unconscious rather than conscious processes, and our sexual mythology commonly designates these areas of experience 'feminine'. For a writer as hostile as Lawrence was to most of the conventionally masculine values of logic, abstraction and technology, the mythology of femininity as something based on intuition, unconsciousness and emotion would have made the choice of a 'woman hero', or at least the choice to write about female experience, almost irresistible.

The issue of the male novelist's rendering of female experience must also take into account what Rosalind Miles has described as 'the assumption that literary creation is itself a masculine act, a process of exploring and mastering the feminine, unconscious mass of life and material' (Miles, 1974, p. 49). Indeed, Lawrence can frequently give the impression that he considered the evocation of feminine reality too momentous and urgent a task to be left to women. Kate Millett has of course made the point that by expressing his 'message'—particularly the notion of female submissiveness—through women characters, Lawrence is being a particularly subtle propagandist (Millett, 1972, p. 239). But it seems to be the pervasive concept of femininity as 'raw material' and masculinity as 'shaping force' which underlies his use of women's writing.

Co-operation with women is present from the very inception of Lawrence's writing career. The early letters to Louie Burrows (a close college friend and for a time Lawrence's fiancée) show that he thought of her, Jessie Chambers and himself as all in some sense budding young writers.

'I write to you as a would-be aspirant after literature, for I know you are such . . . I think you will do well. You are brighter than Jessie, more readable, but you are not so powerful. You will doubtless succeed far better than I who am so wilful . . . Let me see what you do—I am all interest' (Boulton, 1968, p. 2).

The same letter contains a rather schoolmasterly criticism of a piece of Louie's writing:

'Like most girl writers you are wordy. I have read nearly all your letters to J, so I do not judge only from this composition. Again & again you put in interesting adjectives & little phrases which make the whole piece loose, & sap its vigour. Do be careful of your adjectives—do try & be terse, there is so much more force in a rapid style that will not be hampered by superfluous details' (Boulton, 1968, p. 1).

There is some irony in the youthful Lawrence campaigning against longwindedness, the charge most frequently brought against his own later works by his critics. Lawrence also invites Louie's comments on his own work—'Write me your opinions & criticisms—your advice if you like—I shall like it' (Boulton, 1968, p. 3)—although we do not know whether she responded to the challenge.

Throughout the years 1906–1908 the letters to Louie contain frequent references to her writing (none of which is now extant)—encouraging her in the task of revising and commiserating when she started work as a teacher and found she had less time to write. But Lawrence gradually seems to assume an air of superiority in this literary friendship. In 1907 three short stories were submitted for a Christmas competition in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian*. One bore the name of D. H. Lawrence, one that of Jessie Chambers, and the third that of Louie Burrows. In fact all three ('Legend', later given the title 'A Fragment of Stained Glass', 'A Prelude', and 'The White Stocking') were by Lawrence; he had asked Jessie and Louie to submit one each under their names as each entrant was allowed only one attempt. 'A Prelude' won and appeared under Jessie's name in the *Guardian* of December 7, 1907. Lawrence had allowed Louie to revise 'The White Stocking' in her own style before submitting it, but the beginnings of a more patronizing attitude are evident. By 1909 Lawrence seems to be acting as Louie's editor and agent:

'I am glad you are writing stories. I can't do 'em myself. Send me them, please, and I'll see if I can put a bit of surface on them & publish them for you. We'll collaborate, shall we?—I'm sure we should do well. At any rate send me the tales at once, and I'll send em to the publisher some time or other in your name' (Boulton, 1968, p. 38).

Lawrence several times mentions revising Louie's writing for her. In returning one piece to her, he warns, 'Here is your tale—you will not like it'; another time he asks her to send him 'any more of yours you want to see "slaughtered"' (Boulton, 1968, pp. 39 and 42). The short story 'Goose Fair' seems to have been the result of some sort of genuine collaboration. Lawrence originally submitted it to a press agency under a fictitious name that seems to have been a hybrid of his own and Louie's:

'The nom de guerre, as you will see, is a happy mixture of you and me: you are the body, I the head. Qu'en dites vous! I believe you are utterly unrecognisable under my figure-head' (Boulton, 1968, p. 39).

One wonders if it was mere chance that led Lawrence to designate Louie the 'body' and himself the 'head' in their collaborative pseudonym, and whether his assurance to her that she is now 'unrecognisable' is not indicative of something more sinister than a possible desire on her part to remain anonymous. For the press agency plan fell through, and when the story was finally published in *The English Review* for February 1910 it appeared under Lawrence's name alone—although he insisted to Louie that it was 'as much your child as mine', and split the fee he received for its publication with her in acknowledgement of this (Boulton, 1968, pp. 46 and 50).

After Lawrence became engaged to Louie in December 1910 her involvement in his literary work lessened and she seems to have been relegated to the status of a physical mistress. By this time Lawrence was writing *Paul Morel*, later to become *Sons and Lovers*, and his literary collaborator was Jessie Chambers. But with Louie he established a pattern that was to recur several times with other women.

Lawrence's relationship with Jessie Chambers was crucial not only in his psychological but also in his literary development. This latter aspect has only recently begun to be fully acknowledged by critics. During one of their many quarrels, Lawrence tried to persuade Jessie that he should be allowed to marry another woman who would be a purely physical wife to him, while continuing his intellectual relationship with her. Jessie replied that she did not want a part-share in someone else's husband, although she was reluctant to 'refuse the co-operation that he said was essential to his work'. She asked him why, if he did not love her, he did not simply end their relationship. His answer, she says, 'came with shattering sincerity: "Because you are necessary to me"' (Chambers, 1965, p. 141). This necessity which Jessie filled in Lawrence's early life was not that of a source of inspiration, a muse; the help she gave him was practical—criticizing, discussing, supplying him with detailed notes and comments. For years her own literary ability was sunk in what she calls her 'co-operation' in Lawrence's work. On one of their very last meetings,

'We talked about his writing and he upbraided me for not making an effort to do something myself. He was so sure I could write if I would try. "If you only had two books out, I shouldn't care," he said. I knew he was reproaching himself for having occupied my time with his own work' (Chambers, 1965, p. 200).

When Lawrence had first started to write what later became *The White Peacock*, in 1906, the idea had been that Jessie should start a novel at the same time.

'Lawrence now began to talk definitely of writing. He said he thought he should try a novel, and wanted me to try to write one too, so that we could compare notes' (Chambers, 1965, p. 103).

Jessie does not say why she did not produce anything herself, but she read through the first pages that Lawrence brought her, and from then on,

'Lawrence was constantly bringing his writing to me, and I always had to tell him what I thought of it. He would ask whether the characters had developed, and whether the conversation was natural, if it was what people really would say' (Chambers, 1965, p. 115).

Lawrence wrote with Jessie and her opinion constantly in mind. Her taste had been to some extent formed by him, since she had received much of her informal education at his hands; and from being his pupil she became his critic. But she had a mind of her own and was never afraid to tell him when she disliked what he had done. Although she shared closely in the composition of *The White Peacock*—Lawrence wrote to her, 'I its creator, you its nurse' (Chambers, 1965, p. 189)—she seems to have provided mostly encouragement of a general kind. It was in the writing of *Sons and Lovers* that her co-operation became crucial.

Lawrence began writing *Paul Morel* (later *Sons and Lovers*) in the autumn of 1910, around the time that he broke his unofficial engagement to Jessie. He began the novel again early in 1911. Later that year he sent the entire manuscript—between half and two-thirds of the story—to Jessie, and asked her to tell him what she thought of it. Her opinion of it was not very high.

'The writing oppressed me with a sense of strain. It was extremely tired writing . . . The spontaneity that I had come to regard as the distinguishing feature of his writing was quite lacking. He was telling the story of his mother's married life, but the telling seemed to be at second hand, and lacked the living touch. I could not help feeling that his

treatment of the theme was far behind the reality in vividness and dramatic strength' (Chambers, 1965, p. 190).

Jessie suggested that Lawrence should start again, and write straight from his own experience, telling things exactly as they had happened. Her motives were twofold. Firstly, she simply thought that it would make a better novel; secondly, she felt that if Lawrence was forced to come face to face, in his writing, with the problem of his relationship with his mother and his traumatic involvement with herself, his psycho-sexual problems might be resolved.

'It seemed to me that if he was able to treat the theme with strict integrity he would thereby walk into freedom, and cast off the tramelling past like an old skin' (Chambers, 1965, p. 192).

As if he had only been waiting for Jessie's permission to tell the story as it really happened—for there is no doubt that the writing of *Sons and Lovers* was indeed a therapeutic experience for Lawrence, although the issue was not what Jessie had hoped—he wrote back agreeing completely with her diagnosis and asking for her help.

'He . . . asked me to write what I could remember of our early days, because, as he truthfully said, my recollection of those days was so much clearer than his. I agreed to do so, and began almost at once' (Chambers, 1965, p. 193).

In February 1912 Jessie gave him the notes she had written. He had broken his engagement to Louie Burrows, and he and Jessie were back, for a brief spell, on something like their old terms.

'Lawrence passed the manuscript on to me as he wrote it, a few sheets at a time, just as he had done with *The White Peacock*, only that this story was written with incomparably greater speed and intensity. The early pages delighted me. Here was all that spontaneous flow, the seemingly effortless translation of life that filled me with admiration' (Chambers, 1965, pp. 197–198).

But Jessie's admiration turned to dismay as she read Lawrence's portrayal of herself as the frigid, spiritual Miriam. She felt betrayed by his depiction of their relationship, and 'the shock of *Sons and Lovers* gave the death-blow to our friendship' (Chambers, 1965, pp. 202–203). In spite of this final break, Lawrence still wanted to know what Jessie thought of the novel. She arranged a rendezvous at which she merely told him that she had put some notes in with the manuscript; this was almost their last meeting, for soon afterwards Lawrence went to Europe with Frieda. But the desperate need that Lawrence appears to have had for Jessie's approbation can be seen from the fact that he sent her the proofs of *Sons and Lovers* to read in the spring of 1913, an action which profoundly distressed her.

The picture that emerges is one of an almost obsessive need on Lawrence's part for Jessie's seal of approval. We would certainly not have the naturalistic *Sons and Lovers* that we have now, were it not for Jessie's prompting of Lawrence to confront his own experience as directly as possible. Some of her notes and comments on the work in progress the ('Miriam papers') are now in the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas. The papers consist of three manuscript sections in Jessie's hand (the recollections of incidents from their past that Lawrence requested); 23 pages of manuscript in Lawrence's hand with Jessie's interlinear and marginal comments, including material eventually omitted

from *Sons and Lovers*; and four pages of extra comment in Jessie's hand. An account of the content of the 'Miriam papers' is given in an appendix to Harry T. Moore's critical biography of Lawrence.⁴ It is clear that some of the most vivid scenes in the novel derive from Jessie's reminiscences. Lawrence often takes sentences directly from her manuscript; some of the descriptions of nature, especially, go into *Sons and Lovers* almost exactly as Jessie wrote them. Moore has commented that 'her prose is lead, his quicksilver', and warned against over-estimating her part in the novel's composition:

She as a recorder gave him a sequence of remembered facts; he as an imaginative artist dramatically intensified them and made them into literature (Moore, 1974, p. 52).

But to ignore the part Jessie played is as misleading as to over-emphasize it. The story of her involvement with Lawrence's literary work has an ironic ending. After Lawrence had left her she wrote an autobiographical novel, *Eunice Temple*, which she sent to him in 1913, possibly in a spirit of revenge (she later destroyed it). Years later she confessed that she thought she saw evidence of Lawrence's reading of it in *The Rainbow* (Delavenay, 1969, p. 709).

Lawrence's second novel, *The Trespasser*, was based on a 'diary' of Helen Corke's which she wrote during the summer of 1909, describing the holiday she had taken with her lover, a music teacher, prior to his suicide. Helen (like Lawrence, a schoolteacher in Croydon at this time) makes it clear in her autobiography that the 'Freshwater Diary' was a private and therapeutic piece of writing.

'. . . during the autumn I have finished a brief, retrospective diary of the first week of August. The writing of this has been self-indulgence—the opportunity to live again those precious hours; to enshrine them in words. I have chosen the words, balanced the phrases, very carefully' (Corke, 1975, p. 176).

Lawrence helped Helen to come to terms with her grief at this difficult period of her life, and she consented to show him her writing; he had already asked her to read the manuscript of *Nethermere* (*The White Peacock*) and give him her impressions.

'I give him the diary. There is a new urgency in his voice when he returns it. "What are you going to *do* with these prose poems?" he asks. I reply—nothing' (Corke, 1975, p. 177).

Lawrence became fascinated by the story of Helen and 'Siegmund', and finally asked whether he could use Helen's record of her experiences as the basis for a novel of his own.

'He returns to the subject of my Freshwater diary later—comes with the request that he may take it and expand its theme—use the poems as basis for a more comprehensive rendering of the story. He will bring me the work as it grows; nothing shall stand with which I am not in agreement. It shall be a finished study in full accordance with my suggestions' (Corke, 1975, p. 178).

Helen, admiring what she had seen of Lawrence's writing and trusting to his tact, consented. She declined to scrutinize the manuscript in detail as the work progressed, but Lawrence brought each chapter to her as it was completed, and she does not appear to have objected

⁴ 'The Genesis of *Sons and Lovers* (as revealed in the Miriam Papers)'—Appendix D of *The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence* (1951), pp. 365–387.

at any point to his treatment. On the contrary, she wrote that 'the intuition it shows, the rare symbolism, fill me with wonder' (Corke, 1975, p. 180).

Lawrence clearly identified with the Siegmund of the story; Helen felt that it was due to his ability to put himself in Siegmund's place that the novel was successful. Indeed, he began to feel a mounting sexual attraction for her during its composition, a feeling which Helen, despite her fondness for him, did not return. The novel does not simply expand Helen's impressionistic diary into a structured narrative. It gives Siegmund's thoughts and feelings throughout, and in fact we have a fuller psychological picture of Siegmund in the finished novel than we have of Helena (Helen), whose character seems ultimately to have mystified Lawrence. *The Trespasser* follows fairly closely the events described in Helen's diary, and whole sentences of her prose are incorporated unchanged. Apart from filling out the narrative, inventing dialogue, and so on, Lawrence's major innovation was to include the actual scene of Siegmund's suicide and to place the whole story in a wider context, giving, for example, a picture of his unhappy marriage, without which the suicide would seem less credible. Lawrence also includes a self-portrait, a young man called Cecil Byrne who comforts Helena and seems, at the end of the novel, to have won her love—not merely, one feels, to provide a traditional happy ending, but as an act of wish-fulfilment on Lawrence's part; a desire, perhaps subconscious, to impose his version of their relationship on Helen, just as in the writing of *Sons and Lovers* one feels that he was trying to do the same with Jessie. Lawrence of course justified his version on aesthetic grounds in both cases, and in both cases the women concerned later wrote their own accounts (Helen's novel *Neutral Ground* was published in 1933). Lawrence wrote to Helen,

'... as you remember saying yourself, the *Saga*⁵ is a work of fiction on a frame of actual experience. It is my presentation, and therefore necessarily false sometimes to your view. The necessity is not that our two views should coincide, but that the work should be a work of art' (*Collected Letters*, pp. 97–98).

Helen in fact did not see the final revision of the manuscript before it went into print. Originally she and Lawrence had agreed that the novel should not be published for 5 years, although Lawrence tried to place it with a publisher. However, his illness during the winter of 1911–1912 and his subsequent decision to give up teaching left him short of money, and he asked Helen for permission to publish, which she gave him. It was brought out in May 1912, and Lawrence sent Helen a copy from Germany. She wished he had not revised it, but on the whole she was not displeased with the result.

'When the book arrives I open it with mingled exaltation and dread. Why, if there has been no sacrifice of its essential truth to his Moloch of technique and form, did he not send me the revised manuscript as he promised? But indeed the work remains substantially the same—the eroticism of one imaginary scene has been heightened; there are several interpolations of imaginary dialogue—and I miss a fine piece of symbolism—yet it is still the record, faithful enough, of Lawrence's exploration into the territory of H.B.M.'s experience' (Corke, 1975, p. 216).

It would seem, then, that Lawrence's collaboration with Helen Corke was a relatively happy one. Having given Lawrence permission to use her diary she let him have a free

⁵ *The Trespasser* was originally called *The Saga of Siegmund*.

hand, and her remarkable powers of detachment, which had already helped her to come to terms with the tragedy of her lover's suicide, appear to have prevented her from feeling that her own identity was too closely implicated in the character of Helena.

Lawrence revised *Sons and Lovers* in Italy during the second half of 1912, and seems to have enlisted Frieda's help in the rewriting. She says:

'I lived and suffered that book, and wrote bits of it when he would ask me: "What do you think my mother felt like then?"' (Frieda Lawrence, 1935, p. 52).

Frieda also told Mabel Dodge Luhan that she had written pages of *Sons and Lovers*; on another occasion she claimed to have written 'little female bits' (Frieda Lawrence, 1961, p. 186). The thought of Lawrence consulting this sensual German baroness on the reactions of a puritanical Nottinghamshire miner's wife is almost ludicrous, but it indicates that Lawrence believed he had found, in Frieda, an epitome of universal womanhood through whom he had access to a generalized 'female experience'. There are few other instances of her contributing in a direct way to Lawrence's work, although she was often a trenchant critic; but her claim to a place in Lawrence's writing is of course at once larger and more diffuse than any of the other women he knew.⁶ There are close textual similarities between Frieda's memoirs and parts of *The Rainbow*, but Frieda wrote her memoirs after Lawrence's death, and it is impossible to tell to what extent they are themselves influenced by his literary treatment of incidents in her life. The question of Frieda's 'influence' on Lawrence—critics still have not tired of debating whether she was a supreme source of inspiration or a fatal mistake—is part of a more general biographical issue which there is not space to discuss here. But one detail is interesting: Frieda was never the patient amanuensis. 'He never expected me to type', she wrote. 'I hated it. Poor as we were he never expected me to do it' (Frieda Lawrence, 1935, p. 80).

In 1922 Lawrence stayed briefly in a guest house in Darlington, Australia, run by a woman called Mollie Skinner. She was trained as a midwife, but had made a name for herself as a writer in a small way, and had published a record of her experiences as a nurse during the First World War. Lawrence read and enjoyed this, and asked her why she didn't write something about the early settlers in Australia. She was thus encouraged to show him the manuscript of a novel she had been writing called *Black Swans*, which he found a 'wild MS, climbing the mountain of impossibilities and improbabilities by leaps and bounds'.

'Oh, and the ponderous manuscript, tangled, and simply crepitating with type-writer's mistakes, which I read with despair in that house in Western Australia. Such possibilities! And such impossibilities.

But the possibilities touched with magic. Always hovering over the borderline where probability merges into magic: then tumbling, like a bird gone too far out to sea, flopping and splashing into the wrong element, to drown soggily' (*Phoenix II*, p. 294).

Lawrence advised her, much as Jessie Chambers had advised him over 10 years before, to write from her own experience. He suggested her brother Jack as a central character. Mollie Skinner enumerated her objections—she had no time, she had received no proper education, she knew nothing about style, her family disapproved of her writing and it would

⁶ The most recent discussion of this issue is to be found in Anne Smith's contribution, 'A New Adam and a New Eve—Lawrence and Women: A Biographical Overview', in the collection *Lawrence and Women* (1978), of which she is the editor.

'bring hell's fire' on her head if she based a novel on the lives of those she knew intimately. 'Although I was a good midwife', she writes, 'I was unsure of myself as a writer' (Skinner, 1973, p. 115). Lawrence countered her objections and told her to send him what she wrote: he would see about getting it published.

In 1923, in New Mexico, Lawrence received from Mollie Skinner the manuscript of the story he had urged her to write, which she had called *The House of Ellis*. Lawrence thought it better than *Black Swans*, but still 'tangled, gasping, and forever going under in the sea of incoherence' (*Phoenix II*, p. 294). He was reluctant to raise her hopes, but the story seemed to him to have potential. He wrote to her:

'I have read *The House of Ellis* carefully—such good stuff, but without unity or harmony. I'm afraid as it stands you'll never find a publisher. Yet I hate to think of it all wasted. I like the quality of so much of it. But you have no constructive power.—If you like I will take it and re-cast it, and make a book of it. In which case we should have to appear as collaborators, or assume a pseudonym.—If you give me a free hand, I'll see if I can't make a complete book out of it' (*Collected Letters*, p. 751).

Mollie Skinner consented, and Lawrence 'wrote the whole book over again, from start to finish, putting in and leaving out, yet keeping the main substance of Miss Skinner's work' (*Phoenix II*, p. 295). He worked swiftly, and was soon writing to warn her that the ending would have to be 'different, a good deal different', and that he had made 'a rather daring development, psychologically' (*Collected Letters*, p. 760).

It is difficult to estimate how much of *The Boy in The Bush* (as *The House of Ellis* became) is Lawrence's, and how much is Mollie Skinner's. The few attempts that have been made are discussed in the introduction to the Phoenix edition of the novel. The style is distinctively Lawrence's throughout, and it seems that, as he rewrote, he must have welded his own idiosyncratic technique onto Mollie Skinner's narrative. The 'daring psychological development' would seem to be the transformation of the central character into a Lawrentian hero with decided views on such subjects as polygamy. In January 1924 Lawrence sent the typescript of *The Boy in The Bush* to Mollie Skinner. She did not object to his rewriting except at the end.

'When at last I brought myself to read the script, I found that Lawrence had twisted its tail, even adding a new character. I saw why Mittie [her sister] had fumed though I myself gloried in the touches Lawrence had given it. I was dismayed, however, that he had altered the construction and pulled it out of focus towards the end. Jack, the hero I had drawn, would never have ridden a snorting stallion amongst the old shellbacks, intent on seducing their daughters' (Skinner, 1973, p. 128).

One imagines that the novel's emphasis on 'manhood', which places it with *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, *The Plumed Serpent* and the other works of the early 1920s, was not part of Mollie Skinner's original design: however, she merely wrote to Lawrence 'thanking him for making such a fine job of it generally, but begging him to twist the tail back into place' (Skinner, 1973, p. 129). Lawrence reluctantly asked his publisher to make the changes she asked for if possible, but her wishes were not respected and *The Boy in the Bush* was published in 1924 complete with Lawrence's controversial ending.

Lawrence's letters to Mollie Skinner express regret that the publicity material for the book had capitalized on his fame and left her in the background; they also reveal that the division of the royalties was executed with scrupulous fairness. Lawrence undertook no

further collaborations with Mollie Skinner, although in 1928 he sent her detailed comments and suggestions on another manuscript which was never published, and we know that he tacitly edited articles of hers which appeared in *The Adelphi*. It is difficult to see why this literary friendship, conducted almost entirely by post, endured so long. It may be significant that there was obviously no sexual tension in the relationship. Mollie Skinner, who was already well into middle-age when she met Lawrence, and who had a full and busy life of her own outside her writing, was simply grateful for the help and encouragement of an established author. Her conviction that she was his inferior in education and literary know-how seems to have made her willing to accept his rewriting of her work almost without protest.

After leaving Australia in 1922 Lawrence went to New Mexico at the invitation of Mabel Dodge Luhan, a wealthy American who had gone to live among the Indians there. The issue of Lawrence's collaboration with women, indeed the whole question of his relationship with women, here begins to shade off into farce. Mabel candidly admits that she *willed* Lawrence to come to Taos, and a reading of her three-volume autobiography and its continuation in *Lorenzo in Taos* goes quite some way towards explaining Lawrence's bitter attacks on dominating women and the vicious female 'will'. Mabel's redeeming grace is her candour. She openly admitted being a 'predatory woman' (Luhan, 1935, p. 390) and spent most of her life trying to find men through whom she could exercise power. 'A woman cannot and never will be able to do anything without the man, who releases her into creative action', she wrote (Luhan, 1933, p. 241), and elsewhere stated that 'the function of the male principle is to give impetus to the feminine life' (Luhan, 1935, p. 7). In search of the right man through whom to achieve 'a sense of fruitfulness and activity vicariously' (Luhan, 1933, p. 77) she married four times and had numerous lovers, espousing *en route* a variety of more or less radical causes.

Mabel actually wanted Lawrence to take her life and somehow imbue it with significance through a magic process of art—'I wanted Lawrence to understand things for me. To take *my* experience, *my* material, *my* Taos, and to formulate it all into a magnificent creation' (Luhan, 1933, p. 77)—and her wish was temporarily granted. Lawrence rose to the bait and asked her if she would work on a novel with him.

'He said he wanted to write an American novel that would express the life, the spirit, of America and he wanted to write it around me—my life from the time I left New York to come out to New Mexico; my life, from civilization to the bright, strange world of Taos; my renunciation of the sick old world of art and artists, for the pristine valley and the upland Indian lakes. I was thrilled at the thought of this. To work with him, to give him myself—Tony—Taos—every part of the untold and undefined experience that lay in me like a shining, indigestible jewel that I was unable either to assimilate or to spew out! I had been holding on to it for so long, solitary and aware, but helplessly inexpressive!

Of course it was for this that I had called him across the world . . .' (Luhan, 1933, p. 59).

The collaboration never progressed very far. Lawrence's first words on joining Mabel the morning they were supposed to start 'work' were, 'I don't know how Frieda's going to feel about this' (Luhan, 1933, p. 67). Frieda in fact insisted that work on this novel should be done in their house and not in Mabel's, and her shrewd honesty in recognizing Mabel as a sexual rival is refreshing after Mabel's mystical mumbo-jumbo. The project fizzled out:

'How could I talk to Lawrence and tell him my feelings and experiences with *Frieda* in the

room? . . . Then and there I saw it was over, and I should never have the opportunity to get at him, and give him what I thought he needed or have, myself, the chance to unload my accumulation of power' (Luhan, 1933, p. 70).

There remains a letter of Lawrence's asking Mabel for notes about her experiences, which he has broken down into a list of 10 sections, and also for a short story of hers which he says he may incorporate. He also speaks of his plan to include poems of hers in the text, but expresses a wish that she should not read what he has written until it is finished. It never *was* finished, and this is all we know of it.

It may be said that in Mabel Lawrence met his match, and didn't much like what he found. On the other hand, her obsessive desire to submit and be used must have been flattering. She is unique among the women who were involved with Lawrence's writing in her *conscious* desire for him to take her life and turn it into a significant fiction, and her case points up the difficulty of passing a simplistic judgement and casting Lawrence as the villain of the piece. It seems rather that the mythology of woman's experience as the raw material of art and man's intelligence as its shaping force is shared by both sexes and not necessarily imposed upon women against their will—although one can, of course, find examples where it *is* a bitterly resented imposition, as in the case of Zelda Fitzgerald.

One further example may suffice as an indication of Lawrence's method. Catherine Carswell recalls that, between visits to New Mexico, Lawrence called to ask her whether she would be one of the people to go back there with him and form a new type of community. She carefully explained that she didn't feel able to leave her husband and young child. She and Lawrence had been good, though unobtrusive, friends for years, and had always taken a keen mutual interest in each other's work (she was a novelist and critic). To soften the blow of her refusal she began to tell him of an idea she had in mind for a new novel. Lawrence was interested in her theme and suggested that they should collaborate:

'Later Lawrence said . . . "I like that story of yours so much, Catherine, that I've written out a little sketch of how I think it might go. Then, if you like the idea, we might collaborate in the novel"' (Carswell, 1932, p. 211).

Lawrence's synopsis of this unwritten novel is printed by Catherine Carswell in her biography of him, and reprinted in Harry T. Moore's *The Priest of Love*. Lawrence apparently suggested that Catherine Carswell should 'do the beginning and get the woman character going' and he would 'go on and fill in the man' (Carswell, 1932, p. 214). She says that she started work upon the beginning, decided that she was not up to it, and lost heart: she does not intimate whether it was Lawrence's taking over of her idea that disheartened her, or whether she herself had planned a quite different treatment of the theme; but the novel remained unwritten.

I would not wish to overload the phenomenon I have been describing with a significance which it does not really merit. It must be said that the extent to which people other than the author are involved in the process of writing a novel (or anything else) is widely underestimated; such involvement frequently goes much further and much deeper than we imagine. The Romantic concept of the artist has tended to blind us to this, as to other conditions of literary production, with the result that the spectrum which runs from plagiarism to genuine collaboration has not received much study. But I am sure that the pattern I have pointed to in Lawrence's life and work is one that can be found in varying degrees in many other authors; and that it is a significant pattern, particularly when the

authors in question are known for their special relationship to femininity or their skill in depicting the female psyche, as is the case with, for example, Samuel Richardson, Thomas Hardy, Scott Fitzgerald, and of course Lawrence himself.

Catherine Carswell's anecdote, and Lawrence's attitude towards Frieda, seem to endorse the theory that he sought help from women in order to verify his portrayal of female psychology. But in many cases, women provide him with narrative structure or plot, and with descriptions, often of nature, rather than with psychological insight. In *Sons and Lovers* and *The Trespasser* it is the small, incidental details of landscape which Lawrence tends to pick out from the material supplied to him by Jessie Chambers and Helen Corke; one is inevitably reminded of the way in which Wordsworth built on the foundation of Dorothy's observations. The characterization of Miriam in the first novel and Helena in the second owes little or nothing to material supplied by their originals; in Jessie Chambers's case, Lawrence deliberately chose to disregard the information she gave him about her own feelings and attitudes at various crucial points in their relationship. In the writing of *The Boy in The Bush*, Lawrence took Mollie Skinner's narrative and her knowledge of the Australian landscape and atmosphere, and used it as the background against which to set the development of a Lawrentian hero. Frequently, Lawrence seems to appropriate not just material but the creative instinct itself. On more than one occasion, by taking over the idea almost before she has formulated it, his intervention seems to stop a woman writing something herself, as with Helen Corke's poem and Catherine Carswell's novel. But then, it is also noticeable that several of the women whom Lawrence knew betray an attitude towards writing very different from his—it is for them a private, almost therapeutic affair; often, as in Helen Corke's case, it takes the form of a diary written with no thought of publication. Lawrence is of course himself an intensely personal writer, and one who believed that the artist 'sheds his sicknesses' in books; yet his urge is always to turn the experience into fictive form, and to *publish*.

Further speculation in this area waits upon further research, which I believe may significantly widen our understanding of women's relationship both to their own literature and to that of men.

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